

DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF CHIKAN CRAFT IN LUCKNOW

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I. Introduction

Chikankari or Chikan craft refers to delicate and artistic embroidery on a variety of textile fabrics like muslin, silk, chiffon, organza, doriya, organdi as well as synthetic textiles. At first, designs are printed on the cloth with washable colours mainly indigo. This is a specialized job done by a printer, generally a man, who use the traditional wooden blocks. Once the design is printed, the garments are transferred from printer to the chikankar for needlework. As many as 32 types of stitches are used in chikan work called by various names like Jali, Murri, Phanda, Bakhia, Hool, Keel, Tepchi, Dhoor, Joda-Pattee, Ghaspattee, Hath-Katee, etc. Each stitch form has a wide variety of motifs. Different workers specialize in one of the stitch forms, working on the same cloth. Chikan embroidery is done on a number of products such as kurta, ladies' top, shalwar-kameez, saree, sherwani-kurta, dupatta, tray covers, napkins, bed covers, table covers, etc.

Lucknow has been famous for its chikankari for centuries. Chikankari has become a distinctive and integral part of Lucknow culture. Its introduction is attributed to Queen Noor Jahan, wife of Mughal emperor Jehangir. From the very beginning of Moghul period in 1526 AD, the Indian embroidery craft was influenced by outside influences notably from Iran. The cross-cultural exchange encouraged an advanced embroidery craft, which spread in different parts of the country. Dhaka was an important center of chikan craft. Chikan craft flourished in Lucknow under the Nawabs of Avadh, who were great patrons of art and patronised the chikan clothes.

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Chikan craft languished during the British rule due to impoverishment of the local elite and competition from low priced textiles imported from England (Mathur, 1975, p. 1). Efforts were, however, made to revive this industry soon after Independence. The Directorate of Industry launched a Government Embroidery Scheme in 1947 to provide regular employment to craftsmen on fair wages. Chikan centers were opened under the scheme in different localities of Lucknow, where chikan workers were trained under the expert guidance of skilled workmen. It is reported that by the end of the Second Five Year Plan, these centers had enrolled about 1000 craftsmen under the scheme and were producing output worth Rs. 2 lakh, which was estimated to be about 15 percent of the production by private agencies (Mathur, 1975, pp. 1-2). Unfortunately, these centers were closed in 1964. However, later on the production unit was revived.

The chikan scheme of the Directorate of Industry was suspended in 1971. Since then the U.P. Handicraft Corporation is involved in promoting the export of chikan products along with other handicrafts. In 1991 three sales outlets of Chikan Centre and 12 sales depots of the U.P. Export Corporation were under operation. Total sales from these units during 1990-91 amounted to Rs. 123 lakh (Dikshit and Ahmad, 1991, p.17). The Government Chikan Centre located at Moti Mahal in Lucknow has become dysfunctional since then and information of production or sale is not available for later years.

The failure of Government efforts notwithstanding, chikan industry has made significant strides in the last three decades through the efforts of the private entrepreneurs. Due to increasing demand within India and the foreign countries, chikan craft has become an important industry of Lucknow. In recent years it has spread widely around Lucknow in the Awadh region. Though chikan is also manufactured in other parts of India, Lucknow is the predominant manufacturing centre of chikan. The number of chikan workers in Lucknow was estimated at 45,000 in 1971 (Mathur, 1975, p. 6). Today, an estimated 2.5 lakh workers are estimated to be engaged in manufacturing of chikan clothes in Lucknow city and surrounding area extending over several districts.

Traditionally, chikan work was exclusively done by poor Muslim women. Participation of Hindus as chikan craft workers is a relatively recent phenomenon. They now constitute around one-fourth of chikan workers.

A major factor that has lead to the rapid growth of chikan industry in Lucknow and increased demand for the products is that manufacturers have experimented with new types of cloth, designs and products. Traditionally chikan work was done only on white muslin or cotton cloth. However, since many years chikan work is being done on a variety of cloth including synthetic cloth, georgette, etc. The newer variety of product is easier to maintain and popular with the customers. Similarly, chikan work, which was done traditionally only on white or pastel coloured clothes, is now being done in all types of shades and colours leading to their popularity. Equally important has been the introduction of new products and designs. Earlier gent's kurta and sarees were the main products on which chikankari was done. Now one finds that the market is flooded with newer products like salwar suits, ladies tops, etc. *Thus, the ability of the entrepreneurs to anticipate the market demand and introduce changes in raw material, product design, colours, etc. has been a critical factor which has led to the manifold expansion of chikan industry in Lucknow and the surrounding region.*

Alas, the workers engaged in chikan industry have not benefited from the expansion of the industry and growing prosperity of the manufacturers and traders engaged in the industry. Once a prominent clergy of the community, Dr. Kalbe Sadique, while talking about rampant poverty among Muslim Community of Lucknow said "Chikan is the Nasur (unhealing wound) of the community, which is difficult to be cured unless government intervenes." Traders are able to extract high profits taking advantage of the vulnerability of the poor female Chikankars, who have no other alternative for their survival.

The present study was undertaking to find out the income levels and living conditions of the workers engaged in chikan industry and study their problems with a view to suggest suitable intervention strategies for improvement in the conditions of the chikan workers. Interviews were conducted with 26 entrepreneurs and 104 chikan workers to diagnose their problems. The main findings of the study are presented in the following sections.

II. Characteristics of the Entrepreneurs

Reportedly 2500 traders are engaged in the manufacturing and sale of chikan clothes belonging both to Hindu and Muslim communities. For the present study we have surveyed 26 entrepreneurs on random basis from among the chikan craft entrepreneurs of Lucknow spread over different localities of the city where chikan traders are located. In this section we have discussed the various socio-economic characteristics of the chikan craft entrepreneurs.

Demographic Characteristics

Out of the 26 entrepreneurs surveyed one was a female while others were males. The average household size worked out to 5.04 persons. Around 81 percent of household members were in the age group of 15-59, 11 percent were children and remaining 8 per cent old persons. 27 percent of the entrepreneurs were in the young age group of 30 to 45 years, 58 per cent were in the age group of 45 to 60 years and the remaining 15 percent were above 60 years in age.

About 42 percent entrepreneurs were educated up to graduate level or above. Around 20 percent had received education up to intermediate and an equal percentage was high school pass. Only less than 20 per cent had schooling below high school level.

The good economic condition of the entrepreneurs is revealed by the fact that 96 percent of entrepreneurs possess a two wheeler and 50 percent own a car. Around half of them also owned a computer.

Pattern of Production and Sale

Average annual sale per trader as reported by them is given below :

Kurta	3601
Ladies top	2829
Shalwar-Kameez	2824
Saree	2215
Shirts	1742
Dupatta	248
Sherwani	78
Lahanga	12



Majority of entrepreneurs (81 percent) are selling their products from their local showrooms. About 58 percent were selling their products to local traders also and 12 percent had employed sales agents. Over 80 percent reported that they were selling their products outside UP as well. 27 percent reported that they participate in exhibitions in different parts of the country. About one-tenth were exporting their products to foreign countries, mostly the middle east countries.

It is reported that approximately 25 per cent of the produce is sold locally or in other parts of Uttar Pradesh, 50 per cent in rest of India and about 25 per cent produce is exported.

Workers Employed and Wages Paid

On an average an entrepreneur employed about 38 workers including agents, salesmen, cutting masters, printers, traders, chikankars, washermen, etc. Hardly 5 percent of the employees were engaged on regular salary basis. All accountants, 50 percent of helpers and 20 per cent of salesmen were employed on salary basis. The rest were employed on daily wage or were paid piece rate or commission. Details are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Workers Employed by Entrepreneurs on Salary and Wages

Category	On Salary		On Daily Wages		Total	
	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%
Chikankar	0	0.00	624	100.00	624	100.00
Helper	28	50.00	28	50.00	56	100.00
Middleman	2	10.00	18	90.00	20	100.00
Cutting master	1	2.50	39	97.50	40	100.00
Printers	1	1.85	53	98.15	54	100.00
Tailor	1	1.79	56	98.25	57	100.00
Washerman	0	0.00	73	100.00	73	100.00
Salesmen	10	20.00	40	80.00	50	100.00
Accountant	2	100.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	100.00

Average amount of salary/wages paid to workers by entrepreneurs are shown in Table 2. Monthly salary for regular workers varies from a low of Rs. 1000 in case of middlemen/agent to Rs. 3000 for cuttings master and tailor. Similar differences are found in wages paid to different categories of workers employed on daily wages. The cutting master and tailor are paid around Rs. 150 per day, while printers, washermen, salesmen get around Rs. 100 per day. The chikankars get a pitiable wage of Rs. 32 per day.

Table 2: Average Salary/Wages Paid by Chikan Craft Entrepreneurs to Workers
(in Rs.)

Category	Salary per Month	Wages per Day
Chikankar		32
Helper	1614	47
Middleman/agent	1000	96
Cutting master	3000	150
Printers	2000	87
Tailor	3000	158
Washerman		118
Salesmen	2080	95
Accountant	1500	

Investment and Income Levels

Around one-third entrepreneurs had inherited the business from their fathers, while around two-third entrepreneurs had established their business themselves. The average value of business assets owned by the entrepreneurs was reported around Rs. 5 lakh. The average monthly income was reported to be around Rs 21,000. Almost 60 percent entrepreneurs reported improvement in income during the last five years, indicating an expansion of the industry.

Mostly the entrepreneurs were running the business through their own resources. Only 39 percent had taken loan for running their business-23 percent from commercial bank, 12 percent from moneylenders and 4 percent from their relatives.

Raw Material Supply and Costs

Raw material for production mainly cloth and threads is purchased locally by almost 70 percent of the entrepreneurs. Others preferred to purchase raw material required from outside places. Entrepreneurs reported that the cost of production has increased during the last five years by 10 to 20 percent, though in some cases higher increase in cost was also reported.

Profit Margins

There is a large variation in the cost of manufacturing and selling price of every item depending upon their quality. Average costs and prices have been worked out for different items taking a representative range of lower quality products and higher quality products.

Table 3 shows the manufacturing cost, selling cost and the profit margin on different chikan products as reported by the entrepreneurs. Since there is a large variation in the quality and price of products, these ratios may be taken as indicative rather than precise estimates.

Gross profit margins vary from a low of 13 per cent for an ordinary sherwani to 35 per cent for ladies kurta. However, for most of the items gross profit margins fall between 20 and 25 per cent. Net margins would, of course, be lower. Nevertheless, returns to the entrepreneurs are quite high.

Table 3: Item-wise Manufacturing and Selling Cost of Chikan Products (in Rs.)

Items	Manufacturing Cost		Selling Cost		Profit Margin (%)	
	Lower	Higher	Lower	Higher	Lower	Higher
Kurta	233	1287	277	1543	19.02	19.90
Shirt	96	328	115	405	19.32	23.37
Saree	337	2623	449	3125	33.38	19.13
Shalwar-Kameez	389	1710	453	2008	16.50	17.46
Sherwani Kurta	1513	2164	1713	2807	13.22	29.70
Ladies Top	87	251	106	339	22.02	34.80
Dupatta	172	1340	213	1710	23.84	27.61
Lahanga	2500	8000	2917	9750	16.67	21.88
Bed Sheets	219	372	272	463	24.28	24.37

Increase in Production

About half of the entrepreneurs reported increase in production in recent years. Average increase reported was about 20 percent. Major factor for expansion was business was growing demand both local and outside. Around one-tenth entrepreneurs reported export to foreign countries.

The high profit margins and increasing demand for chikan products have attracted a number of new entrepreneurs to the industry. However, the benefits of the expanding industry are not reaching the chikan workers, whose conditions remain as pitiable as in the earlier days. We, therefore, now turn to the analysis of the condition of workers in the chikan industry in the next section.

III. Socio-Economic Conditions of Chikan Craft Workers

The chikan craft employs a variety of workers performing specialized tasks in addition to the chikankars (embroidery workers) such as cutting masters, tailors washerman, printers and agents. Over 90 per cent of the workers are engaged in embroidery work, while the rest are engaged in related activities. For this study we surveyed 104 workers associated with the chikan industry. Detailed information was collected about the socio-economic conditions of these workers with the help of a structured questionnaire. The workers were randomly selected from different localities of the city where majority of chikan workers are concentrated.

Occupational Distribution

The sample covered 63 chikankars, six cutting masters, six tailors, six washerman, nine agents and fourteen printers (Table 4). Out of total chikan craft workers interviewed largest proportion of workers were engaged as Chikankar (60.6 percent) followed by printers (13.56 percent) and agents (8.7%).

Table 4: Religion-wise Distribution of Chikan Craft Workers

Category	Hindu	Muslim	Total
Chikankar	22(78.57)	41 (53.95)	63 (60.58)
Cutting master	1 (3.57)	5 (6.58)	6 (5.77)
Printer	1 (3.57)	13 (17.11)	14 (13.46)
Tailor	1 (3.57)	5 (6.57)	6 (5.77)
Washerman	3(10.72)	3 (3.95)	6 (5.77)
Agent	0(0.00)	9 (11.84)	9 (8.65)
Total	28(100.00)	76(100.00)	104(100.00)

Note: Figures in parenthesis show percent to total in each column..

Religion

Around 73% of the sample workers were Muslims and the rest 27% Hindus (Table 4). Among Hindus a larger proportion of workers were engaged in embroidery work as compared to the Muslim workers.

Caste Composition

Caste wise composition of workers has been presented in Table 5. About half of washer men belonged to Schedule Caste. But their proportion was only 10 per cent among chikankars, while a few were engaged in printing work. Around 45 per cent of chikankars, one third of cutting masters and around one-tenth of printers, tailors and agents belonged to Other Backward Castes. About 45 per cent of chikankars were Muslims. The proportion of Muslims was much higher in case of tailors, master cutters, printers and agents. But none of the washer man was Muslim. Thus, one observes a clear caste-occupation nexus in the chikan industry.

Table 5: Caste-wise Composition of Chikan Craft Workers (%)

Category	SC	OBC	Others Including Muslims	Total
Chikankar	10.39	44.51	45.10	100.00
Cutting master	0.00	33.33	66.67	100.00
Printer	3.61	9.64	86.75	100.00
Tailor	0.00	8.11	91.89	100.00
Washerman	50.00	50.00	0.00	100.00
Agent	0.00	12.00	88.00	100.00
All Workers	9.67	34.02	56.30	100.00

Size of Household

Table 6 shows the average size of household of chikan craft workers. The average size of household for the total sample comes to 5.6 consisting of 2.7 males and 2.9 females. The differences in the size of household among occupational categories are not marked. Average household of chikankar workers is slightly lower at 5.4, comprising 2.2 males and 3.1 females.

Sex Ratio

The proportion of females in the households of chikankars is distinctly higher, with a sex ratio of 1407 females per 1000 males. In other categories of workers sex ratio is found to be adverse. Low number of male earners along with extreme poverty compels the females to take up low paid chikankari work.

Table 6: Average Size of Household of Chikan Craft Workers

Category	Male	Female	Total	Sex Ratio
Chikankar	2.22	3.13	5.35	1410
Cutting master	3.50	2.50	6.00	714
Printer	3.79	2.14	5.93	565
Tailor	3.50	2.67	6.17	763
Washerman	3.00	3.00	6.00	1000
Agent	2.56	3.00	5.56	1172
Total	2.65	2.91	5.57	1098

Age Profile

Table 7 shows the age structure of household members of Chicken craft workers. About one-fourth of the household members were children below the age of 14 years. Majority of household members (72.2 per cent) were in the working age group of 15 to 60 years. Only 3.5 per cent were in the age group above 60 years.

Table 7: Age Structure of Households of Chikan Crafts Workers

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0-14	(71) 25.73	(70) 23.10	(141) 24.35
15-59	(191) 69.20	(227) 74.92	(418) 72.19
60 +	(14) 5.07	(6) 1.98	(20) 3.46
Total	100.00 (276)	100.00 (303)	100.00 (579)

Note: Figures in brackets show total number of household members.

Educational Profile

Table 8 shows the educational profile of the household members of chikankars. About 46 percent of the persons were illiterate. About 38 percent had education below high school level, 6.5 percent had acquired learning up to high school level, 2.4 percent had studied up to intermediate and 3.9 per cent were graduates. The percentage of literate without schooling is 1.78 %. One interesting fact that emerged from the study is that the education profile of female members did not differ much from that of male members.

Table 8: Educational Profile of Household Members of Chikankars

Educational Level	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	(65) 46.43	(91) 46.90	(156) 46.29
Literate without schooling	(1) 0.72	(5) 2.54	(6) 1.78
Below High School	(57) 40.72	(70) 35.53	(127) 37.69
High School	(3) 2.14	(19) 9.65	(22) 6.53
Intermediate	(3) 2.14	(5) 2.54	(8) 2.37
Graduate	(9) 6.52	(4) 2.03	(13) 3.86
Total	(140) 100.00	(197) 100.00	(337) 100.00

The educational profile of respondent workers was similar to that of total family members (Table 9). About 46 percent of the workers were illiterate. Almost the same proportion had schooling below high school level. A little above ten per cent of the household workers had education above high school level. The education profile was more or less similar in case of male and female workers.

Table 9: Educational Profile of Chikan Craft Workers

Educational Level	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	(117) 42.39	(132) 43.57	(249) 43.00
Literate without schooling	(1) 0.36	(8) 2.64	(9) 1.56
Below High School	(121) 43.84	(117) 38.61	(238) 41.11
High School	(15) 5.44	(25) 8.25	(40) 6.91
Intermediate	(5) 1.81	(7) 2.31	(12) 2.07
Graduate	(9) 3.26	(6) 1.96	(15) 2.59
Total	(276) 100.00	(303) 100.00	(579) 100.00

A study of 1000 chikan workers in 1991 had revealed that 72 per cent of chikan workers and one third of their children were illiterate (Dikshit and Ahmad, 1991, p. 42). Our survey reveals a much lower level of illiteracy. Thus, with the passage of time the educational profile of chikankars is gradually improving.

Occupational Distribution

Out of 579 family members 237 persons were engaged in some economic activity, giving a worker-population ratio of about 41 percent. About 53 per cent of the workers were engaged in chikan industry while the rest were engaged in some other economic activity. In

case of chikankar households nearly 53 per cent workers were engaged in some other activity. This suggests that chikan work is taken up as a secondary activity to support the household. In case of cutting master only 25 per cent reported engaged in other activity, while all workers in the family of washermen were engaged in the same occupation (Table 10).

Table 10: Occupational Distribution of Total Household Workers

Occupational Category	In Chikan-Industry	In Other Occupations	Total
Chikankar	47.17	52.83	100.00
Cutting master	75.00	25.00	100.00
Printer	67.65	32.35	100.00
Tailor	50.00	50.00	100.00
Washerman	100.00	0.00	100.00
Agent	52.94	47.06	100.00
Total Workers	53.16	46.84	100.00

Table 11 shows the distribution of household workers by occupation and sex. All the Chikankar workers were females. Other occupations associated with chikan industry like cutting, tailoring, printing and washing are exclusively the preserve of males. Majority of agents were also females, who take orders from traders and distribute work to household members and other women in the neighbourhood. A few female members of chikankar households are also engaged in other low paid occupation as well, while in other occupational categories females were not found engaged in economic activity, as their condition is economically better.

Table 11: Per Household Number of Workers by Occupation and Sex

Category	In Chikan Industry			In other Occupations			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Chikankar	0.00	1.19	1.19	1.24	0.10	1.33	1.24	1.29	2.52
Master Cutter	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.33	0.00	0.33	1.33	0.00	1.33
Printer	1.64	0.00	1.64	0.79	0.00	0.79	2.43	0.00	2.43
Tailor	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	2.00
Washerman	1.17	0.00	1.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.17	0.00	1.17
Agent	0.22	0.78	1.00	0.89	0.00	0.89	1.11	0.78	1.89
Total	0.42	0.79	1.21	1.01	0.06	1.07	1.43	0.85	2.28

Monthly Income

Earning levels in chikan industry have been extremely low, though they have been going up in nominal terms. A study by Mathur in mid seventies revealed that a chikan worker earned Rs. 28 per month (Mathur, 1975). Another study conducted in 1991 found that a chikan worker was earning Rs. 5 per day. This would give a monthly income of Rs. 100 to Rs. 150 per month per worker depending upon the number of days of employment.

Table 12 shows average monthly income per worker by occupation as revealed by our survey. A chikankar earns a monthly income of Rs.575 only. Income in other occupations related to chikan craft is five to six times higher. While printers, tailors and agents earn a monthly income of around Rs. 2500, washermen earn Rs. 2817 and the cutting master Rs 3300. Monthly income earned by household workers engaged in other activities is also quite low ranging from Rs. 750 to Rs. 1900 per worker. This suggests that other household members are engaged in low income generating activities in the informal sector.

Table 12: Average Monthly Income Per Household Worker (in Rs.)

Category	Chikan Craft Workers	Other Workers	Total Workers
Chikankar	575	1799	1248
Cutting master	3300	1000	2971
Printer	2543	1891	2256
Tailor	2515	750	1632
Washerman	2817	-	2817
Agent	2522	1900	2229

Monthly household income of the sample workers is reported at Rs. 4039. It varies from a low of Rs. 2879 in case of chikankars to Rs. 8766 in case of printers (Table 13). The high level of poverty among chikan workers can be seen from the fact that per capita income of a chikankar household is only Rs. 538. In fact, chikan work provides around one-fourth of their total income. Thus, chikan work is taken up only as a supplementary source of income as it cannot provide even subsistence income at current levels of earnings. For printers also more than half of the income is contributed by other sources. But in remaining categories the contribution of income from other sources was relatively less.

Table 13: Average Monthly Income Per Household and Per Capita by Occupation

Category	From Chikan Craft	From Other Work	Total Household Income	Per Capita Income
Chikankar	684	2195	2879	538
Cutting master	3300	1770	5070	845
Printer	4171	4595	8766	1478
Tailor	2515	1500	4015	651
Washerman	3296	0	3296	549
Agent	2522	2109	4631	833
All Households	1720	2319	4039	725

Working Hours and Regularity of Work

Daily working hours for Chikankar and cutting master are about 7 to 8 hours, while other workers like tailors, printers and washer men work for 10 to 11 hours daily (Table 14). Generally work is available for around 25 days in a month. Around two-thirds of chikankars reported getting work through the agent and the remaining one-third get work directly from the traders. Majority of other category of workers in chikan craft get their orders for work directly, though some reported getting work through agents also. 70 per cent chikankars reported getting work regularly. In case of other occupations the proportion of workers getting regular work was much lower.

Only 57 percent chikankars reported getting payment regularly. A small number of cutting masters reported getting regular payment.

Table 14: Working Hours and Regularity of Work

Category	Daily Working Hours	Working Days in a month	% Getting work Regularly	% Getting Payment Regularly agents	% Getting work through
Chikankar	7.21	25.40	69.84	57.14	63.49
Cutting Master	7.83	25.33	0	16.67	-
Printer	10.14	23.14	21.43	50.00	28.57
Tailor	9.50	23.03	33.33	66.67	33.33
Washerman	10.33	21.67	50.00	83.33	16.67
Agent	7.56	28.00	55.56	88.87	-

Time Taken for Manufacturing Chikan Items

The time taken to produce a chikan item varies very considerably depending upon the item produced and the nature of embroidery work. Table 15 shows average time taken for embroidering different items according to the intricacy of the design. The estimate of time required is based on the responses of the workers surveyed assuming that one worker works for 8 hours a day. Thus, a gent's kurta takes one to two person weeks for embroidery work. An ordinary shalwar kameez may take 15 person days, while the same product with intricate design may take almost a month. Similarly, a saree may take around 20 person days to 50 produce person days for carrying out the embroidery work.

Often, different workers from within the household or outside carry out embroidery on the same item. Hence, the number of days required to produce an item may vary according to how many persons work on it and how much time in a day they are able to devote to the work.

Table 15: Time Taken for Manufacturing Chikan Products (in Person Days)

Category	Kurta	Shalwar Kameez	Ladies Top	Sherwani	Saree	Dupatta
Ordinary Design	8	15	3	56	22	29
Intricate Design	17	27	6	76	49	54

Rates of Payment

Normally the workers are paid according to the piece rate for producing various items and carrying out various tasks like embroidery, cutting, printing, tailoring, washing, etc. The rates for various items vary considerably depending upon the item produced and the nature of embroidery work.

Table 16 shows the rates paid to workers for producing different items and quality of chikan products. As the embroidery work is most intricate and time consuming, lion's share of wages are received by the chikankars, ranging from around 80 per cent to almost 100 per cent.

**Table 16: Rate of Payment to Workers for Manufacturing Chikan Products
(Rs. Per Piece)**

Category		Kurta	Shalwar Kameez	Ladies Top	Sherwani	Saree	Bed Sheet	Dupatta
Chikankar	Minimum	79.07	160.33	33.33	657	156	100	437.5
	Maximum	194.04	307.88	72.82	836	572	125	642.5
Cutting Master	Minimum	1.66	2.16	1.08	2.5	-	-	-
	Maximum	2	2.25	2	3	-	-	-
Printer	Minimum	1.57	1.57	1.57	1.71	1.71	4.29	4.64
	Maximum	2.21	2.21	2.17	2.39	2.39	5.43	5.29
Tailor	Minimum	7.16	8	4.4	9.33	-	-	-
	Maximum	10	12	8	15	-	-	-
Washerman	Minimum	7	8.66	2.66	7.83	8.83	8	10
	Maximum	10.5	14	9	13	15	-	-
Total Labour Charge Share of chikankar	Minimum	96.46	180.72	43.04	678.37	166.54	112.29	452.14
	Maximum	218.75	338.34	93.99	869.39	589.39	130.43	647.79
	Minimum	81.97	88.72	77.44	96.85	93.67	89.06	96.76
	Maximum	88.70	91.00	77.48	96.16	97.05	95.84	99.18

Share of Wages in Selling Price

As chikan embroidery is a labour intensive process wages constitute a fairly high share in manufacturing cost (Table 17). The share of wages is lower in case of higher quality products as compared to lower quality products. Share of wages in selling price generally varies from one-third to two fifth in case of lower quality products and one sixth to one third in case of higher quality products. Thus, the traders are cornering a high share of good quality products without sharing them with the workers.

Table 17: Share of Wages in Manufacturing and Selling Costs of Chikan Products

Item	Share of Wages in Manufacturing Cost (%)		Share of Wages in Selling Price (%)	
	Low Quality	High Quality	Low Quality	High Quality
Kurta	41.43	17.00	34.81	14.18
Saree	49.38	22.47	37.02	18.86
Shalwar-Kameez	46.49	19.79	39.90	16.85
Sherwani Kurta	44.85	40.17	39.61	30.97
Ladies Top	49.36	37.38	40.45	27.73
Bed Sheets	51.33	35.07	41.30	28.20

Housing Status

Housing conditions of the surveyed workers also reflect their poor economic condition. Nearly 80 per cent of chikankars were living in their own houses. However nearly 60 per cent of them were living in one or two room tenements with less than 400 sq ft area (Table 18). The living room is also used as the working place.

Table 18: Housing Status of Chikan Craft Workers

Category of Workers	Sample House-Holds (NOs.)	Living in Own House	Size of Houses Percentage to Total Household			
			<200 sq.ft.	200-400 sq.ft.	400-600 sq.ft.	600+ Sq.ft.
Chikankar	63	80.95	14.29	46.03	26.99	12.69
Cutting Master	6	66.67	16.67	50.00	16.66	16.67
Printer	14	35.71	21.43	35.71	21.43	21.43
Tailor	6	66.67	16.67	50.00	16.66	16.67
Washerman	6	50.00	--	66.67	33.33	--
Agent	9	100.00	--	44.45	33.33	22.22

Table 19 shows the availability of basic amenities in the houses of the surveyed workers. Hardly one third of the workers had a toilet/bathroom in the premises. They have to go out to defecate on roadsides or use public latrines. Around one-sixth of the houses had dry latrines, which are legally banned. Piped water supply was available in about 60 percent of the houses of chikankars. But about one-third chikan workers had to fetch water from outside water sources. Electricity was available in about two-thirds of the houses of chikankars. At least one-third houses are yet to be electrified.

Table 19: Houses Having Toilet, Water Connection and Electricity (%)

Category of Workers	Toilet/Bathroom	Source of Water			Electricity
		Pipe	Hand pipe	No Water	
Chikankar	33.33	60.32	3.17	34.92	63.49
Cutting Master	33.33	33.33	50.00	16.67	66.67
Printer	42.86	71.43	7.14	21.43	85.71
Tailor	16.67	16.67	33.33	50.00	50.00
Washerman	33.33	50.00	-----	50.00	100.00
Agent	33.33	88.88	11.11	-----	66.67

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Health Status

The poor condition in which the chikan workers live and work affects their health adversely. The most common complaint is that of strain on eyes and decline in vision due to the bad lighting and intricate nature of work. A study of 1000 chikan workers in 1991 revealed that 46.7 percent of workers complained of strain on eyes and 35.3 per cent suffered from head ache (Dikshit and Ahmad, 1991, p. 23).

Profile of a Chikan Worker

Bholi is 25 years old and married. At the age of 15 she started working in the Chikan industry. Bholi learned this work in a center for Chikan Kari production. The center didn't pay her much, therefore she quit after a short time. One main reason for the low payment was that the customers often complained about the work and refused to pay. This is a common problem in the industry. Whereas men are involved in trading and marketing, women do the production. They manually design a pattern with threads on the cloths. Now as a home-based sewer in the Chikan Kari industry, Bholi earns Rs 6-8 per piece. For making each piece she normally uses 5-7 hours. Sometimes she only earns R 1,75 and she even has to pay for some of the materials. Usually she receives work from a store. She has to use middlemen and cannot go directly to the shop herself. This gives her few possibilities to bargain for a better payment and makes her feel vulnerable. Bholi and the other Chikan workers in the neighbourhood told that there has not been any labour inspector to visit them. Actually, the Chikan workers didn't have knowledge about the existence of that kind of reporting system.

Source: Website of FoodFirst Information & Action Network (FIAN)

IV. Government and NGO Interventions

As we have pointed out in the beginning efforts were made by the state government to revive this industry soon after Independence. The Directorate of Industry launched a Government Embroidery Scheme in 1947 to provide regular employment to craftsmen on fair wages. Chikan centers were opened under the scheme in different localities of Lucknow, where chikan workers were trained under the expert guidance of skilled workmen. It is reported that by the end of the Second Five Year Plan, these centers had enrolled about 1000 craftsmen under the scheme and were producing output worth Rs. 2 lakh, which was estimated to be about 15 percent of the production by private agencies (Mathur, 1975, pp. 1-2). Unfortunately, these centers were closed in 1964. However, later on the production unit was revived.

The chikan scheme of the Directorate of Industry was suspended in 1971. Since then the U.P. Handicraft Corporation is involved in promoting the export of chikan products along with other handicrafts. In 1991 three sales outlets of Chikan Centre and 12 sales depots of the U.P. Export Corporation were under operation. Total sales from these units during 1990-91 amounted to Rs. 123 lakh (Dikshit and Ahmad, 1991, p.17). The Government Chikan Centre located at Moti Mahal in Lucknow has become dysfunctional since then and information of production or sale is not available for later years.

These efforts do show that government intervention was helpful in improving the condition of workers by providing them training and employment and had a positive impact of their wages and earning levels. In these circumstances the withdrawal of government support is somewhat intriguing and inexplicable.

A few cooperative were also established in the sixties. However, the experiment was not successful. Cooperative model is not regarded as suitable for the chikan industry (Mathur, 1975).

The poor plight of the chikan workers has attracted the attention of some NGOs, who tried to organize the chikan workers. The most successful and well known NGO initiative for the betterment of the poor and exploited women chikan worker is that of the Self Employed Women's Association popularly called SEWA. The organization was set up in 1984 by two dedicated women, Sehba Hussain and Runa Banerji, with a view to organise the helpless women who were engaged in chikan work to ensure them fair wages and a life with dignity. It required great grit and determination to organize the women in the face of great odds and stiff opposition of the local traders.

The main strategy of SEWA was to train women workers to make them self reliant and put them in direct touch with the customers avoiding the exploitative chain of the intermediaries. For this purpose centers were set up, where experienced artisans imparted training to women joining the craft in various aspects of chikan work like fabric cutting, block-printing, and different types of stitches used in the embroidery.

SEWA opened a sale depot in Hazratganj market of Lucknow in 1985. Later on sale centers were set up in Delhi and other cities. To promote sales of its products SEWA is organizing annual exhibitions in Delhi and Mumbai. Now it is participating in fashion shows in major centers in USA, Australia and European countries. Its turnover now runs into several crores. SEWA mainly caters to the richer and more discerning segment of the market as its products are relatively costly as the work is more refined and higher wages are paid to the workers. Over the years it has carved out a niche market for its products.

The network of SEWA has now spread to 10 districts in Uttar Pradesh and covers 5,000 women workers including both Hindus and Muslims. It is also providing micro credit facilities to the women members and is running a school and a health center as well.

The SEWA intervention has provided economic security to the poor women. Apart from improving their economic status, it has helped in women empowerment through self reliance and a better standing in their homes and in society. It provides a model for the organization and betterment of the chikan workers. Some other NGOs like NEED have also taken up the task of organizing and training the workers. However, the reach of these NGOs is still very limited. They do not cover more than 5 per cent of chikan craft workers, whose number runs into lakhs. Hence the plight of the overwhelming majority of chikan workers remains as bad as ever.

Another laudable attempt of the NGO initiative in the chikan craft is that of Media Lab Asia, which has developed the software "CHIC" to enable generate new chikankari designs at its hub in IIT, Kanpur (see Appendix A). This software enables fast turnaround of new chikankari designs by the rural entrepreneurs engaged in the chikan work. A provision exists for automatically engraving these designs on blocks using specific materials and equipments and thereafter moulds can be made using the blocks. This product is being field tested in partnership with Datamation Foundation in the Lucknow-Kanpur belt.

V. Strengths and Weaknesses of Chikan Industry

Strengths

- Old and flourishing traditional craft
- Availability of a large number of skilled workers
- Growing local and outside demand for the products
- Willingness of entrepreneurs to introduce new designs and products

Weaknesses

- Stronghold of entrepreneurs and traders on the industry
- Existence of a number of intermediaries between the worker and the entrepreneur
- No direct contact between the worker and the consumer
- Extreme poverty and weak bargaining position of the workers
- Dispersed and household based system of production
- Lack of organization of workers
- Lack of legislative protection and government support

VI. Suggested Strategy

Chikan is an old handicraft which has seen an unprecedented growth in the recent decades. The critical factor in the growth of the craft has been the willingness of the entrepreneurs to introduce new products, designs and raw material leading to the increasing demand for the product both locally and outside. The Lucknow chikan products have acquired a world wide fame. Though the chikan industry has flourished and attracted new entrepreneur the condition of the workers engaged in the craft remains pitiable. Workers earning are extremely low and their living conditions are deplorable. The abject poverty forces them to take up chikan work to supplement their family income.

It is surprising that the poor conditions of the large number of chikan workers living in the state capital and the surrounding region failed to draw the attention of the state government. For some inexplicable reason whatever little efforts were introduced by the government after independence have been withdrawn. Workers cooperatives and organizations are non-existent. Some successful interventions have been made by the NGO sector for training and welfare of the chikan workers, but the reach of these organizations is limited.

Protective and promotional measures for the chikan craft workers are urgently called for. A few suggestions in this respect are offered below:

(i) minimum wages for the workers engaged in the craft should be prescribed and strictly enforced. Minimum piece rates for different type of work should be prescribed taking into account the value of the product and time taken to produce it, so that a women engaged in the work for eight hours may earn a subsistence wage atleast. An enforcement machinery for the purpose will have to be put in place.

(ii) An advisory council for the craft may be set up with participation of entrepreneurs, workers, NGOs and government which may fix the minimum wages and suggest promotional and welfare measures and supervise the enforcement of the policies.

(iii) The workers should be organized into self help groups with the help of government agencies and NGOs. These self help groups may be federated at the local, district and state level. These SHGs and their federations should be provided entrepreneurial training, credit and marketing facilities so that they can take up production and marketing of their products and establish direct links with the consumer. This will help eliminate the chain of intermediaries and also put pressure on the private entrepreneurs to pay decent wages.

We encourage the Indian authorities to:

- **Implement the Minimum Wages Act, 1948**
- **Elaborate a piece rate system**
- **Reconsider the position of a labour inspector, preferably female**
- **The National Commission for Unorganised Sector should be established**
- **Start social security schemes and health insurance for Chikan Kari workers**
- **Establish day care centers for the Chikan women's children**

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(iv) The government training centers should be revived and made functional. The U.P. Export Corporation should set up a cell for encouraging export of chikan products.

(v) Exhibitions and fairs should be organized in different parts of the country and abroad where chikan craft workers may be encouraged to participate and sell their products.

(vi) Technical institutions may be involved to work on improved designs and other aspects of the craft. The computer generated designs developed by India Media Lab with the help of IIT Kanpur provides a good example for such interventions.

(vii) Social assistance scheme for chikan craft workers should be introduced providing protection against old age, sickness and death.

(viii) Welfare measures aimed at improving the living conditions of the chikan workers should be introduced by the government in partnership with NGOs. These may cover provision of better housing, assistance for education of children, adult literacy programme, crèche for children, opening up of hospital and dispensaries in the localities where there is a concentration of chikan workers, etc.

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Appendix A

CHIC - Craft Revival: A Media Lab Initiative

Media Lab Asia at its hub at IIT Kanpur has developed the software "CHIC" to enable generate new chikankari designs. This software enables fast turnaround of new chikankari designs by the rural entrepreneurs engaged in the chikan work. A provision exists for automatically engraving these designs on blocks using specific materials and equipments and thereafter moulds can be made using the blocks. This product is being field tested in partnership with Datamation Foundation in the Lucknow-Kanpur belt.

Philosophy of the Project

India has the rich heritage of craft design and craft products. It spans from embroidery, metal work, woodcraft, stonework, to toy design. The Craft Revival Project envisages concentrating on reviving the past glory of the Craft design in India and popularizes the same with the help of modern technology without losing its unique characteristics. The present project intends in concentrating on Lucknow Chikan embroidery. Lucknow Chikan embroidery is well known for its especial characteristics in design and embroidery technique and is one of the most popular embroidery works in India. Approx. 7.5 lakh women are engaged in Chikan embroidery work in 8 districts of Central U.P. The Philosophy of the project is to revive the rich Indian craft tradition. Many of the traditional crafts are vanishing due to its complex design, material, manufacturing process etc. The modern technology can simplify and restore the heritage of traditional craft design without losing its essence. Considering the above philosophy Lucknow Chikan embroidery has been identified as an area for initial field application.

Objective

In Lucknow Chikan Embroidery, the present practice of using wooden blocks to convert designs is time consuming and expensive, with limited variations in design. The present project tries to look into the following areas:

Understanding the contemporary design style and the past heritage.

Using Computer Aided Design (CAD) to developing new motifs and composition of past Indian and original Persian design motifs.

The project would also develop hand-held computer printer, in place of block, for easy transfer of design directly from the computer to the fabric surface.

Chikan CAD, the Software

Chic is a 2D graphics and diagram editor for window system. It is very simple to use and is very user friendly. The interface is similar to MS Paint, so it should not be a problem for Windows users. There are a lot of features provided in the software. Some of them are like opening and saving a file, cut, copy, paste, undo, redo, zoom, magnetic grid etc. There is a help section which can answer any general queries by the user. A wide array of motifs and designs come with the Chic library. This is useful for creating new designs by combining/modifying them in any way. Any new design created by the user can also be saved for future use. The technique of Chic is similar to "Jafri design". Chic runs on all Java compatible platforms like Windows 9x/NT/2000.

Stages in Making Blocks

- 1.) Creating designs using the Chic Software
- 2.) Using Roland X-Y Engraver tool for engraving the design onto the block.
- 3.) This block is then used for creating moulds using chemical compound.

The next step is making the mould out the carved block. Then the block is left to dry out for about 5 hours, and then the final mould is taken out of the block.

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Source: Website of Media Lab Asia